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Vietnam, Kampuchea, and the Sino-Soviet Talks

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As the 1 March starting date for the second round of the Sino-Soviet talks nears, Vietnam continues to show concern that its position in Kampuchea could be undermined by a Sino-Soviet accommodation despite continued Soviet assurances. Since late last year, top Vietnamese officials have exploited every available occasion to ascertain their Soviet ally's attitudes toward the talks. [redacted]

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Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Vo Dong Giang met with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa on 3 January in Moscow to discuss Kampuchea and Soviet strategy for the second round of talks. One month later, Kapitsa travelled to Hanoi--and other Southeast Asian nations--reiterating Soviet support for Vietnam. [redacted]

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Vietnamese concerns are two-fold. A Sino-Soviet accommodation that involved a cutback in Soviet military and economic aid to Vietnam would complicate Hanoi's efforts to control Kampuchea and would further strain the Vietnamese economy. Secondly, we believe Vietnamese leaders fear that loss of Soviet support would tip the military balance of power toward China, forcing Hanoi to deploy even more troops along its northern frontier and possibly increasing the risks of Chinese military action there. [redacted]

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Near-Term Progress Unlikely

So far, China and the USSR have made no progress toward accommodation on Kampuchea. According to diplomatic reports, the Chinese have offered nothing to encourage Moscow to change its position on Kampuchea. Soviet media continue to attack the

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Chinese for their refusal to accept the Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh, and have stated that "third party" interests would not be sacrificed to achieve an agreement. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Soviets are still delivering trucks, tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery to Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea. [redacted]

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The lack of movement to date on the Indochina issue is not surprising. China has little to offer the Soviets that would offset the present advantages they enjoy from their relationship with Vietnam. Moscow's support of the Vietnamese allows access to Vietnamese air and naval facilities, permitting the USSR to conduct extensive maritime surveillance and intelligence collection over the South China Sea and the western Pacific. Access to facilities in Vietnam also improves the Soviets' ability to monitor US surface fleet operations and could provide support to the Soviet Indian Ocean squadron. Furthermore, a demonstrated willingness by Moscow to sacrifice the interests of a major regional ally for an agreement with the Chinese would likely weaken Soviet credibility among Third World states. [redacted]

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The Chinese at this time would be extremely reluctant to agree to a settlement in Indochina that recognized the primacy of the pro-Vietnam group in a Kampuchean coalition government. On the political front, resistance to the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea has allowed Beijing to find common cause with the five ASEAN nations, which historically have been more wary of Chinese than Soviet or Vietnamese intentions in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's support has provided the Chinese-backed, anti-Vietnamese resistance group in Kampuchea the international recognition otherwise denied it, and prevents Vietnam from consolidating its positions as a major regional power and virtual overlord of Indochina. Diplomatic reports indicate that the Chinese want to give the resistance groups time to strengthen their forces before they consider any negotiated solution in Kampuchea. [redacted]

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Even if Moscow and Beijing were to reach some form of agreement on Indochina, Hanoi probably would not cooperate. As indicated in many public statements, the Vietnamese believe the establishment of a client regime in Phnom Penh is necessary to their security. In our opinion, Hanoi believes that were Kampuchea not under Vietnamese control, it would fall under Chinese influence. Furthermore, for the Vietnamese leadership, Kampuchea is the only major Vietnamese policy success since unification--one the leadership is unlikely to let slip. [redacted]

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Political and Military Options

Should Hanoi sense some movement toward a Sino-Soviet accommodation further down the road, it has some military and

political options of its own. Vietnam could stage a large-scale provocation along the Sino-Vietnamese border, the Thai-Kampuchean border, or among the South China Sea island groups that Hanoi disputes with Beijing. Such an action would be aimed at forcing the Soviets into supporting Vietnam. [redacted]

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On the political front, Hanoi might try to prevent a Sino-Soviet arrangement on Kampuchea by initiating negotiations to create a coalition government between the Hanoi-backed Heng Samrin forces and the non-Communist resistance in Kampuchea--thus isolating the Chinese-backed Communist resistance forces. [redacted]

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[redacted] Based on earlier Vietnamese actions, we believe these overtures are not serious, but are another in a series of Vietnamese ploys to divide the resistance. They may also, however, be a reminder to both the Soviets and the Chinese that Hanoi too can act unilaterally. [redacted]

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If the Vietnamese were to face a total loss of Soviet military aid, they might sharply escalate their military activities in Kampuchea in an attempt to cripple the resistance before the supply pipeline closed. This would require the transfer of several divisions from the Chinese border--the Vietnamese have only 75,000 Vietnamese troops facing about 45,000 guerrillas in the Thai-Kampuchea border area. To be assured of success, the Vietnamese would also have to use air power--used only sparingly in the past--and mount extensive operations inside Thailand against supply caches, refugee concentrations, retreating guerrillas, and perhaps Thai military and administrative personnel. [redacted]

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The Need for Aid

Moscow's ability to influence Vietnam depends mainly on the effectiveness of military and economic aid as a lever. Soviet trade and aid data show that Moscow provided about \$3 million per day in economic aid to Vietnam in 1981. The costs of oil supplies--about 30,000 barrels per day--and of the Soviet-financed grain shipments probably account for the bulk of the payments. In addition, some \$1.8 billion of military equipment was shipped to Vietnam during 1979 and 1980 to supply Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea and to strengthen defenses against China. [redacted]

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USSR: Economic and Military Aid to Vietnam

(million US \$)

	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Total	350	345	600	1,775	1,235	1,240
Economic	--	--	485	700	545	950
Military Equipment	--	--	115	1,075	690	290

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Soviet reduction or elimination of military aid would have little immediate impact on Hanoi's military operations in Kampuchea. Vietnam has ample stockpiles of military equipment, and we believe the Vietnamese still have the capability to manufacture the small-arms ammunition necessary to maintain the effectiveness of their overwhelmingly light infantry-style army for several years. Over the longer haul, Vietnam's poor record of maintaining more sophisticated equipment and the inevitable shortages of spare parts would limit the military's flexibility. A Soviet aid cutoff would also, in time, erode the capabilities of the units assigned to the northern border against China, where most of the more sophisticated Soviet equipment is deployed.

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A cutoff or reduction of Soviet oil deliveries to Vietnam would have a more serious impact.

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We estimate that the Vietnamese have a 30-day supply of fuel in Kampuchea. Once this was exhausted, the mobility of Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea would be sharply curtailed, and we would expect a slow but steady deterioration in the security situation in the interior of the country. In addition, the Vietnamese would have to abandon the large-scale combined arms operations employed successfully last dry season (November 1981 - May 1982) along the Thai-Kampuchean border. We believe, however, neither the loss of mobility nor the cutback in large operations would weaken the Vietnamese position enough over the short term to compel a withdrawal or reduction in forces.

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The loss of Soviet economic aid would also cause problems for Vietnam's domestic economy. The loss of oil would be most severely felt. The Vietnamese now receive over 90 percent of their petroleum products from the USSR. Middle Eastern and African suppliers ended their deliveries in 1981 because of Vietnam's inability to service its debt to them. Hanoi's poor payments record, along with the decline in oil producers' incomes, suggests that these suppliers would be reluctant to renew any trading relationship.

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The loss of food aid would be less serious. Improved agricultural production over the past two years suggests the Vietnamese could get by without Soviet-financed grain deliveries. [redacted]

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